

Council – 20 April 2009

Annual Scrutiny Report 2008/09

Portfolio: Procurement, transformation and performance management Councillor Arif

Service: Corporate Performance Management

Wards All

Summary of report

This is the annual report to Council outlining the work of scrutiny in 2008/09. The report provides an overview of the work undertaken during the municipal year by each of the panels and their respective working groups.

Recommendations

Council are recommended to:

Note the annual scrutiny report for the 2008/09 municipal year (annexed) and that this will inform the further developments of the council's scrutiny function.

Resource and legal considerations

Scrutiny is a key aspect of the governance framework and an integral part of how the council makes effective decisions. Good scrutiny can help to inform policy making and help ensure that decisions taken by the cabinet are in effectively considered prior to implementation. The role of Scrutiny is defined in Walsall's constitution, Article 6.

Citizen impact

Effective scrutiny enables the public to fully engage in the topics under review. Ensuring that the items for consideration are effectively communicated via the council's website and public notice boards encourages citizens to become involved in the scrutiny process. Any potential work item that will have citizen impact will be fully scoped and include the opportunity for public involvement.

Environmental impact

The work of scrutiny picks up on a range of environmental factors across the whole borough. There are no direct environmental considerations as a result of this report.

Performance and risk management issues

The role of Scrutiny is fundamental in ensuring that the most effective and informed decisions are taken whilst delivering value for money for residents.

This report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny and Performance Panels which helps to achieve these objectives.

Asking members to recognise and review past achievements and consider the potential items to scrutinise helps to ensure that the Scrutiny and Performance Panels focus their attention on the main issues that have strategic relevance and importance to the council as a whole. Incorporating an effective scoping process enables a risk based approach to be taken in the development of potential work programmes; focussing on the key issues that affect the performance of the council, impact on service delivery or potentially result in service delivery that does not meet resident expectation or offer value for money. The Council's priorities and pledges are all considered when looking at potential work programmes for the following year and frequent performance monitoring reports are presented to individual Scrutiny and Performance Panels.

Equality implications

This report details all of the work that has been across the whole borough. Scrutiny Members represent a number of wards across the borough and actively work with residents to best represent their views at Scrutiny.

Consultation

Individual panels have sought the expert opinion and views from witnesses to ensure that a balanced perspective is provided against any of the work topics under consideration. This year, evidence has been brought to the panel by officers, members of the public, officers from other authorities, independent experts and consultants. In addition the specific panel input from the end of year report had been considered by each panel prior to publication.

Vision

Effective Scrutiny will touch on each of the priorities identified within the council's vision. These priorities are all considered during the scoping exercise of establishing of a work programme. Outcomes identified within this report and delivered through Scrutiny can help the council to achieve its stated ambition of becoming an excellent authority.

Background papers

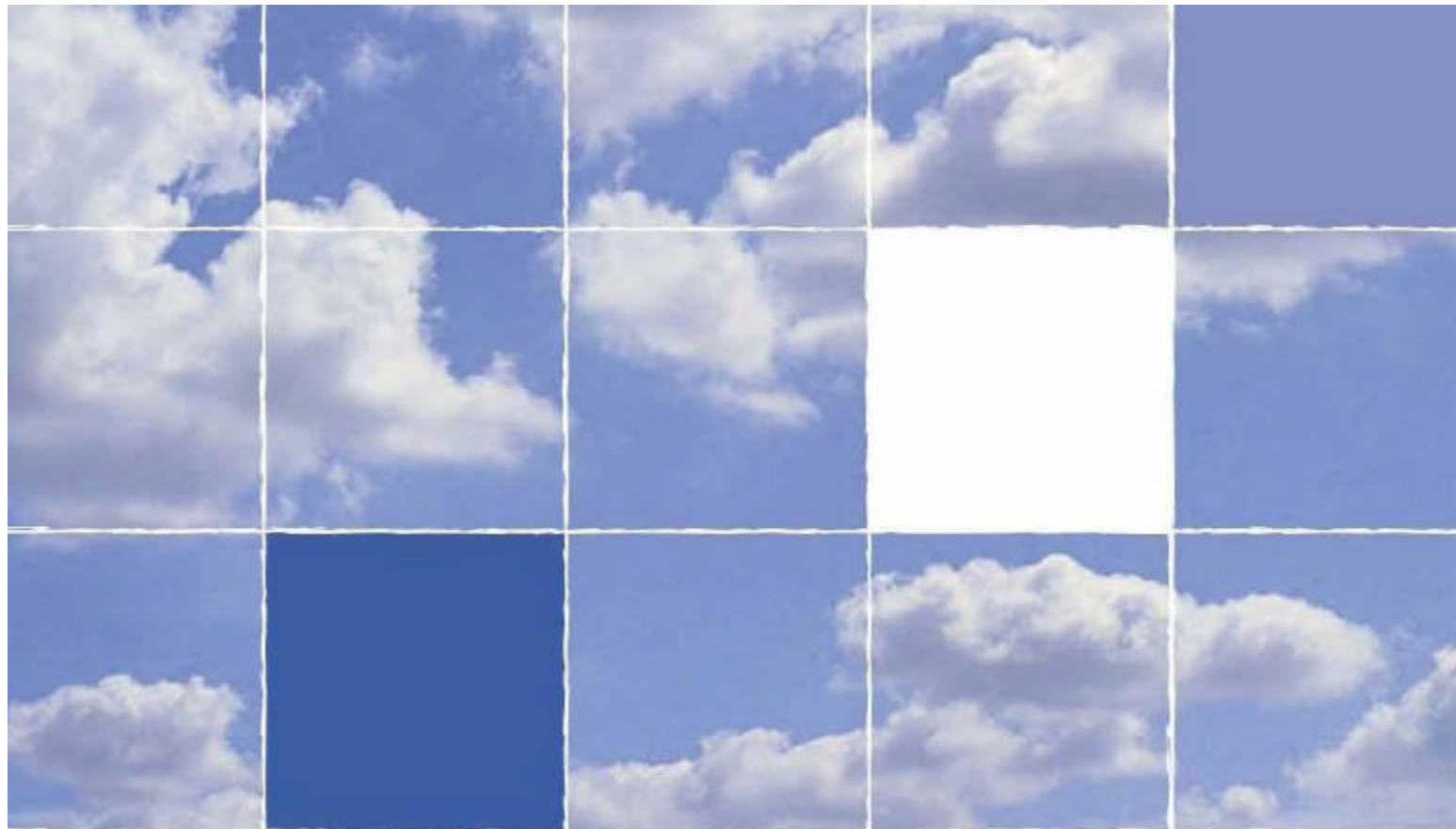
Scrutiny Annual Report at **Appendix 1**.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Rory Borealis', is centered on a light gray rectangular background.

Rory Borealis – Executive Director - Resources
20 April 2009

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Scrutiny Annual Report 2008/09



Walsall Council

Foreword

Walsall Council's Scrutiny and Performance Panels make an important contribution to the decision making process.

During the last year Scrutiny Members have considered a wide and diverse number of topics including anti-social behaviour, affordable housing, school academies and the redevelopment of the St Matthews Quarter. In addition they have contributed to the budget setting process and carried out service reviews such as that in Payroll and Pensions.

The Council is in the middle of a challenging but exciting time and Scrutiny Members will be at the heart of this. As we progress into the era of Comprehensive Area Assessment with our shared objective of making Walsall a great place to live, work and invest, Scrutiny will play a vital role in enabling the voice of the community, engaging with partner agencies and assisting with policy development.



Paul Sheehan
Chief Executive

Contents

Introduction	3
Scrutiny Working Group	4
Children and Young People	6
Corporate	9
Health Social Care & Inclusion...	12
Heath Sub	15
Neighbourhoods.....	18
Regeneration.....	21

Introduction

Scrutiny and Performance panels are made up of non-executive members from across all political parties and they exist to provide accountability to the Council. They have four key roles:

- Holding the Executive to account for their decisions;
- Scrutinising local partners (e.g. NHS Walsall);
- Reviewing and developing policies and making recommendations to Council on these; and
- Carrying out service reviews to ensure services are providing value for money and meeting local needs.

In doing all this they also have a vital role in enabling the voice of local residents through community engagement. All meetings are open to the public to attend (except in exceptional circumstances where something has to be taken in private session) and the public can also suggest items for scrutiny to consider.

At the start of each municipal year following the meeting of full Council, where the panels and membership are set along with the remits and dates for these panels, each panel develops a work programme for areas within their remit and may also establish working groups to carry out reviews of a service or to look at a particular issue in more depth.

Each Panel meets approximately once every six weeks and invites portfolio holders, key officers and relevant partners along to the meetings to provide information

and answer questions. The Panel can then make recommendations to the relevant body on what course of action they think should be taken. Most scrutiny activity takes place before a decision is taken, however Scrutiny Panels do have the power to 'call-in' a key decision of the Cabinet, this means the decision can not be implemented until the panel have had the opportunity to consider and make recommendations on the issue (within set timescales.)

The following report gives an overview of the work undertaken by the scrutiny panels during 2008/09; it is not an exhaustive account but gives a good flavour of the wide variety of work undertaken.

Scrutiny Working Group

The Scrutiny Working Group in its format and origin is an informal gathering of the chairs, and by invitation vice chairs, of scrutiny and performance panels. The group has met regularly throughout the year to oversee and coordinate work programmes and to discuss ways to improve the scrutiny function.

At each meeting the group have received information regarding the ongoing activity at the scrutiny and performance panels which has assisted in sharing and comparing experiences at individual panels from a co-ordinated and strategic perspective. They also discussed a number of items affecting more than one panel and collaboratively agreed on how these items will be received by scrutiny and performance panels, for example community cohesion, outcomes from the equalities peer assessment and councillor call for action. In addition they have considered a number of items including:

Scrutiny and Performance Panel Working Group- A toolkit for Members

Following feedback from members involved in scrutiny and the Member development steering group the scrutiny working group reviewed and commented on the documents and process for working groups that conduct scrutiny panel activity between meetings. This newly refined toolkit was agreed by the group who recommended its roll out to all panels when establishing their work programmes for 2009/10. They felt the toolkit

would help provide working groups with focus and guidance and also in drafting the reports back to the full panels so as to enhance the outcomes from scrutiny activity.

Annual Survey of Scrutiny Members

The scrutiny working group received and commented on a survey to be distributed to all scrutiny members (including co-optees) to gather their opinions on the scrutiny process and suggest improvements. They suggested some amendments to this survey to make it more effective and agreed to consider the results once known. In addition the group have already considered conducting a more detailed review of this process in the next municipal year.

Value for Money Toolkit

Use of the value for money toolkit had previously been agreed by scrutiny chairs but the group reconsidered the format and content of the toolkit as part of considering and noting the successful use of this toolkit by the Corporate Panel in a review of the Payroll and Pension Service. The group have recommended all scrutiny and performance panels consider using the tool in carrying out service reviews when setting the work programme for 2009/10.

Member Development

The Chairs provided comments on the member development training programme and these were fed back to Human Resources and Development. They also recognised that development was much wider than just this formal

training programme and were keen to recognise, and capture, learning that occurs in the day to day work of a councillor, particularly those on scrutiny. The working group toolkit (see above) was seen as one way in which this learning could be captured and questions were also included in the scrutiny survey.

Children and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Councillor E. Hughes (Chair)
Councillor E.E Pitt (Vice Chair)
Councillor Bird
Councillor Cassidy
Councillor Chambers
Councillor Khan
Councillor Martin
Councillor Munir
Councillor Towe

Plus the following co-opted members: K Yeates; P Williams; E Chawira; D Harborne Smith; A McDevitt; D Jones; B Grainger

Building Schools for the Future

Building Schools for the Future (BSF) was launched by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) in February 2003. BSF is a new approach of investment in secondary school buildings providing improved buildings, but also high quality facilities and integrated information technology.

Walsall had made a successful bid for BSF Wave 6a and would therefore work with three national partners to deliver 5 projects in the borough. The projects could be complete or partial rebuilds or the refurbishment of existing school buildings. The Panel are set to consider the selection process for the five projects at a future meeting. Also, in recognition of the significance of this item, the Panel were particularly keen to receive regular progress reports on the status of the projects.

Change for Children Contract Key Performance Indicators

The Panel learnt how the contract between the Council and Walsall Children's Services –Serco was to be monitored. Members received a briefing on the Key Performance Indicators included in the new contract and discussed the key role that they had in monitoring it.

Darlaston Science College – Call in of Cabinet Decision

The Cabinet decision; 'That Cabinet agreed that consultation, on the closure of Darlaston Community Science College on 31 August 2009 to enable it to open on 1 September 2009 as an Academy, takes place early in the Autumn term' was 'called in' to scrutinise the consultation process.

The panel discussed information presented by Walsall Children's Services – Serco on the background to the proposed academy and the process followed to date, as well as hearing the concerns of members of the school's governing body over the proposal. Members discussed the importance of an open consultation, which would ensure everyone gets the chance to have their say, including the school's governors

The panel made a recommendation to Cabinet that the Darlaston consultation process should commence immediately and be as wide as possible and should include all teachers unions and the Anti-Academies Alliance.

A special meeting of the Panel was then called to consider the format and content of the consultation paperwork before it was issued to parents. Members made a range of recommendations on ways in which the consultation document could be made more accessible and easily understood by consultees. Although some of these recommendations were not implemented.

The panel continued its involvement by receiving a summary of the results and assurances that the widest possible circulation of the consultation had taken place. Members were keen to ensure that Cabinet received a full and balanced report on the consultation outcome and the Panel reported back to Cabinet on the discussions that had taken place at Scrutiny.

Positive Activities

Council requested that the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel considered the duty under section 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, where local authorities are expected to secure access for young people to "positive activities" including youth clubs, sports facilities and arts projects, and investigate the provision for positive activities available to different age groups.

Upon completion of its work, the panel requested that the Safeguarding Children Working Group change its remit to consider Positive Activities. To date, the working group have been informed of requirements of the Education and Inspections Act Section 6 and

the actions in Walsall to meet them.

Primary Capital Programme Strategy for Change Submission

The Primary Capital Programme Strategy for Change Submission sets out Walsall's vision for transformation of primary schools across the borough over the next 14 years through Primary Capital Programme funding. The initiative would make available £500m a year over 15 years to rebuild or refurbish approximately 50% of all primary and secondary schools.

The panel sought guidance on how this would fit in with the 'Change for Children contact' and following requests from members, some clarification on the criteria used to select schools to receive funding as part of the programme was provided.

Property Services

The remit of the working group has been to consider property services and buildings within education and children's services

The group received regular project register updates, and considered the education projects within it. The working group visited two of the key projects - the new Mary Elliott and Joseph Leckie School buildings - and were impressed with the new facilities. Members agreed that Walsall should be proud of the new Mary Elliott School and that it was a flagship for the borough.

Shelfield Sports and Community College- Call in of Cabinet Decision

The Cabinet decision to approve consultation on the proposal to close Shelfield Sports and Community College from 31 December 2008 subject to the agreement of the Secretary of State to approve the opening of the school as an academy from 1 January 2009, was 'called in' by members.

Members discussed how academy status could affect applications and the admissions policy. The panel were reassured that any proposed changes to the admissions policy would need to receive the consent of the Secretary of State. The panel were concerned about how academy status would affect accountability of the school, and how the Council would be represented on the Governing body. After full consideration of the issues, scrutiny approved the consultation, subject to a report on the consultation outcome being considered by scrutiny prior to Cabinet. .

Sneyd Community School

On 22 October 2008, Cabinet tasked the Panel to review future options for Sneyd Community School.

A special meeting of the Panel was held at Sneyd to consider a range of possible options for the future of the school not considered by Cabinet. The Panel heard from a range of witnesses at the meeting, which was well attended by approximately 180 members of the public. The Panel made a number of requests for further information,

which led to the matter being considered at a later meeting.

The Panel reconvened to consider the additional information and after debating the options, Members concluded that the issue would benefit from the close scrutiny of a working group. Therefore, the Sneyd Working Group was established. The Sneyd Working Group held its first meeting, at which officers presented a discussion paper, outlining each of the options for Sneyd. Detailed discussions on each of the options for Sneyd took place during this and a further two meetings of the working group.

The working group reported its findings to a meeting of the full Panel, which again received a high level of public interest with more than 60 members of the public in attendance. The Panel supported the working group's recommendation to retain education provision on the Sneyd site so long as it was financially viable, met the needs of the local community, and took into account the impact on the schools community in the north west of Walsall.

Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Councillor Longhi (Chair)
Councillor Nazir (Vice Chair)
Councillor Bird
Councillor Cook
Councillor Chambers
Councillor Flower
Councillor Sarohi
Councillor Turner
Councillor Yasin

Budget

The Corporate Panel operated as the lead panel for informing and scrutinising the budget setting process for 2009-11. As well as commenting on proposals for the process and receiving updates on financial performance during the year, three meetings were devoted specifically to looking at the budget from a corporate services and council wide perspective.

The panel received resource packs, aimed at guiding members through the budget setting process by providing the 'story' for each of the services for previous and future years. The panel agreed to look at their own resource pack in depth and asked other scrutiny panels to do the same and report back to them with a summary of findings.

Members discussed the draft budget proposals for corporate services and budget recommendations for the other scrutiny and performance panels. Each chair was invited to feedback their panels recommendations. Members suggested additions and alterations to these and put them forward to Cabinet for consideration.

Members were pleased to see that several of their recommendations in relation to corporate services were in Cabinet proposals. This included Cabinets recommendation to make the Welfare Rights Service core funded, as this was a point which they had long supported. The panel's recommendation to make savings from back room functions in order to protect frontline services was also accepted; as was their recommendation for the protection of legal services at current levels.

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

At the beginning of the municipal year members requested further information on the specific role members would be expected to play within the new CAA. Members received information on the key differences between the new Comprehensive Area Assessment and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. The panel considered ways that it could monitor and review performance under the new inspection regime.

Corporate Assessment Findings

Following the Corporate Assessment Members were presented with its key findings. Members were informed that the Council had maintained a score of '3' which represented strong progress. The panel considered the findings on scrutiny and discussed these claims and how this could be improved in the future.

Debt Recovery

Following a request from the Panel, the members received a presentation on the Council's debt recovery processes and performance in this service. They were pleased overall with the hard work of the team in chasing debts and supported the adoption of a management by exception policy to make the process simpler and more effective.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) Strategy

Following a review of the Council's approach to ICT, the panel were informed of measures in place to make improvements, and future plans for the service. Members were pleased to see that improvements had been made in the National eService Delivery Standards and commented that they had noticed improvements in the service provided by ICT themselves. The panel considered the establishment of a governance committee should take precedence so that it could help shape the strategy, and Members recommended that the ICT strategy was put in place as a priority.

Maintenance of Council Property

This item was referred to the panel following consideration at the Procurement Working Group, where concerns were raised about the procurement process. Further information was provided about the procurement process, and documentation required to put in a tender. Members were pleased to discover that unsuccessful bidders were offered feedback on their bid.

Member Development

Members were given information on the member development team and the panel considered provision of member training opportunities, and suggested ways of improving attendance. Members were supportive of the idea of capturing the learning that took place as part of the scrutiny process and recommended the inclusion in working group documentation a way of capturing this learning,

Single Status and Equal Pay

Officers informed the panel that single status aimed to harmonise terms and conditions between manual workers and other staff. The panel received an update on the Single Status and Equal Pay project and were able to ask a number of questions around the process and some of the risks involved. It was agreed that the panel would receive a further update once pay modelling had been completed but in the interim that they would also receive a report by exception should the task group feel the risks had significantly raised so as to require members to be informed.

Value for Money Toolkit – payroll and pensions

The Value for Money toolkit had been completed to make a judgement regarding value for money provided by the payroll and pensions service and to identify any further action. Members considered this to be a positive piece of work and supported the service in providing the payroll service to other organisations at profit. This piece of work has

resulted in recommendations to pursue options toward making the service cost neutral. The Panel also recommended that other scrutiny panels use the VFM toolkit for services within their areas as they had found it a very useful exercise.

Further Work

The Panel are also set to complete another Value for Money review regarding the Councils communications team. Members will also be considering a Council referral on the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Health Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Councillor T. Oliver (Chair)
Councillor C. Ault (Vice-Chair)
Councillor D. Anson
Councillor J. Barton
Councillor R Carpenter*
Councillor M. Bird
Councillor C Micklewright*
Councillor A. Mushtaq
Councillor A. Paul
Councillor I. Robertson
Councillor V. Woodruff

Councillor C. Micklewright, who sadly died during the Municipal Year, was replaced on the Panel by Councillor R. Carpenter. The Panel placed on record their thanks for the dedication shown by Cllr Micklewright in all her work for Walsall.

Affordable Housing Working Group

This working group was established in the previous Municipal Year by the Panel to consider housing strategy, sustainability and choice. Given the cross-cutting nature of these issues an invitation to join the working group was accepted by the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel. A key element of the activity undertaken by the working group during this year has been to identify the housing issues that exist within the Borough. Members have also considered a range of issues in relation to Walsall Housing Group, including a proposed and completed group restructure of WHG. This involved the transfer of

properties into one property owning Registered Social Landlord (RSL).

The working group strongly advocated the importance of more affordable housing in Walsall – and in particular the need for additional social housing for rent.

The working group has continued to monitor the performance of WHG following the restructure and provide updates to the respective Panels.

Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) Judgement

Officers guided the Panel that the outcome of the annual inspection represented a significant improvement on the previous year. The Panel wanted to understand how CSCI viewed the budget cuts within social care. Members were provided with guidance that the Commissioning and Use of Resources judgement had improved from uncertain in the previous year to promising this year. Further guidance was provided by Officers that insufficient funding within social care was well known national issue. However CSCI had acknowledged that within Walsall investments was focused in the appropriate areas to achieve value for money. Although challenges remain, including ensuring that priority works and improvements are sustained.

Disability Facilities Grant (DFG) Assistance

The Panel continued to monitor Disabled Facilities Grants due to previous concerns regarding the lack of resources available and the

long waiting lists for some service users waiting for minor adaptations. Members noted with concern the projected underspend in the budget for DFG's for this financial year and received updates on progress with addressing the underspend. The Panel were informed that it would not be possible to present a final balance until June 2009. A recommendation was made that Cabinet ensure any underspend on DFG during 2008/09 be carried forward into the 2009/10 DFG budget.

Homelessness in Walsall

The Panel identified as a concern an apparent disparity between official recorded figures for homelessness and the figures quoted in the local media. In an attempt to tackle the limitations of the data a multi-agency homelessness group undertook their own survey which identified key elements to local homelessness and reported this back to the panel. Issues included the high number of white British males accessing services and the high percentage of those who suffered from drug and/or alcohol problems. A further challenge existed in that a significant number of rough sleepers were not claiming the benefits they were entitled to as they were of no fixed abode, this often led to individuals committing crimes in order to survive. A key issue identified was the difficulty that appeared to be experienced by rough sleepers in accessing services, which was compounded by the reluctance of many rough sleepers to engage with organisations like the Council. The Panel were keen to see an

emphasis placed on outreach support in the homelessness strategy. Members were pleased to be informed that a "single point of entry" to services was being considered for those services funded via the Supporting People grant.

The Panel will continue to receive regular updates on progress made in tackling homelessness in Walsall.

Local Involvement Network (LINKs)

During the Municipal Year the Panel received guidance on the introduction and development of the LINKs in Walsall and had a presentation from the appointed host, the Carers Federation.

At its March meeting, the Panel received a report outlining a proposal recommending termination of the contract with the host, which would be made to Cabinet. Members discussed the potential implications and agreed that it was vital to ensure that robust contingency plans were in place upon termination of the contract.

Links to Work

Members had concerns regarding proposals for the restructure of the Links to Work service and were keen to make sure this did not have any detrimental impact on service provision. They received updates during the year, visited the Links to Work facilities to speak to staff and service users and also held a meeting at which staff and service

user representatives were invited to present their views.

The panel were supportive of the crucial importance of the aspirations of the Government emerging 'Valuing People' Strategy to support people with their disability to live a normal life as possible – including support towards employment opportunities.

The Panel were given assurances that the approach taken in the development of the future options for Links to Work had been to ensure impact on service users was minimal. Members made several suggestions regarding the potential development and marketing of Links to Work to increase income and potentially prevent the requirement for further posts to be placed at risk.

The Panel were concerned that a high proportion of staff at risk at Links to Work were people with disabilities and therefore may experience barriers in the recruitment process. Members were keen to ensure the council removed these barriers for those placed at risk during the Links to Work restructure. It was recommended that these issues needed to be taken up at a corporate level by the whole council.

Residential and Nursing Care Services

A progress report was taken on the tendering process being undertaken in relation to residential and nursing care services. Members expressed concern that bed spaces would be lost as a result of the tendering of the

service, officers assured members that this was not the case, but that the Council would in fact increase its overall capacity and give more choice to local service users.

Heath Sub Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Councillor V. Woodruff (Chair) Councillor M. Bird Councillor A. Paul Councillor I. Robertson

New Development of the Manor Hospital

During the Municipal year the Panel were updated on the development of the new Hospital and changes to the services provided, it was also highlighted the hospitals application for Foundation Trust status. Members sought guidance on a number of issues relating to the impact on services of the change. Members were also keen for the profile of the new hospital to continue to be raised and an article recently appeared in Walsall Pride.

Darzi Report

This report lays out plans to combat the “postcode lottery” of medicine distribution that is currently being experienced across the UK. This issue prompted the Panel to consider how local health issues within Walsall are targeted at present. In this respect the Panel have been informed that the possible moving of the Sexual Health Clinic is being considered on the basis that sexual health may be more effectively tackled from within communities and closer to residents rather than within one structure contained within the hospital. Further work undertaken by the Panel during the Municipal year on targeting of treatment included consideration of whether or not there are trends or clusters

of cancer sufferers within the borough.

Dudley and Walsall Joint Mental Health Trust

Members continued to scrutinise progress with the establishment of the new mental health trust. The Trust reported to the Panel that all areas of service delivery for which it was now responsible had been received in good order and with sound finances. The Panel were also informed that there had been no impact on service delivery. Review work was now being undertaken to enable the Trust to have a comprehensive understanding of the range of services that it was responsible for and plans were in place to review the future of the trust as it moved forward. As the Mental health Trust is a new organisation the Panel will monitor the new arrangements into the next municipal year.

Equal Access to Primary Care Public Consultation

The Panel were informed by representatives from the tPCT of the outcome of the equal access to primary care public consultation exercise to which they had contributed a response. The consultation indicated that there was support for proposals to open three new GP practices in the north and west of the Borough as well as the town centre. A Member indicated their view that there was a lack of GP provision in Short Heath and was guided by tPCT representatives that this area was part of the tPCT’s wider planning process.

Performance Monitoring

The Panel have continued to receive and monitor performance information on hospital acquired infection, ambulance response times and hospital complaints, including details of corrective action being taken to address below target performance.

Commissioning NHS Dental Services for the East of the Borough

Members considered the proposed procurement of dental services by NHS Walsall as part of its oral health improvement and dental commissioning strategy.

The Sub-Panel considered the proposals and were satisfied that there was an imbalance of NHS Dental practices in the east of the borough. Members felt that two smaller practices would be appropriate, with one placed in a more affluent area. The practices should work together in partnership with each other and other local surgeries and be easily accessible by all methods of transport at all times that the practice is open.

Transforming Community Services – Enabling New Patterns of Provision

The Panel were briefed on the new Department for Health guidance surrounding the required transformation of community services and the move to a purely contractual relationship between health providers and commissioners.

Members were pleased to hear that many of the steps required by the

Department of Health were already in place in Walsall, however, there were still important challenges to be met before Community Foundation Trust status applications could be made.

Reducing Perinatal and Infant Mortality

The Panel considered an extensive report from the Director of Public Health on the steps being taken to reduce perinatal and infant mortality.

Members heard that the main causes of premature infant death in the borough were mothers from social deprived backgrounds, mothers who smoked during pregnancy and mothers who were part of consanguineous marriages. The Sub-Panel was pleased to hear that a range of support services were now in place to assist mothers and families tackle these key issues and agreed that it was important this issue was tackled to increase life expectancy in the borough.

Breast Screening

Following consideration of the tPCT's Healthcare Commission Annual Healthcheck the Sub-Panel sought further information on why Walsall was considered to be under performing in the numbers of women coming forward for breast screening.

Members learnt that the target included in the Healthcheck was a regional figure. Locally Walsall was meeting its targets, however, there were still issues that needed addressing in terms of engagement with Black and Minority Ethnic

groups and accessing locations for mobile screening vehicles.

World Class Commissioning

The World Class Commissioning (WCC) initiative is still in the development process. WCC completed a study of worldwide community health organisation best practice and produced a framework for use in the United Kingdom to assess community health providers and provide a score on their performance. A report on the outcomes for Walsall's community health providers will be considered later in the year with a particular focus on areas of poor performance.

Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Councillor C. Towe (Chair)
Councillor C. Creaney (Vice-Chair)
Councillor M. Ahmed
Councillor L. Beeley
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor D. Pitt
Councillor I. Robertson
Councillor V. Woodruff

Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group

During the year the Panel established an Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Working Group to consider further approaches for the Council in tackling ASB, concentrating on the key themes of education, prevention, enforcement; and rehabilitation to maximise the outcomes achieved. To support the Working Group in addressing this issue, Members appointed a range of co-opted advisors from the Police, Walsall Housing Group, Children's Services, the Fire Service and the PCT.

The Working Group's held sessions with stakeholders, including social landlords and a range of community representatives. They attended meetings of the Borough Tasking Group, held a meeting with Neighbourhood Watch Chairs, and used questionnaires to gather information from agencies. They also undertook a visit to Manchester City Council to gain further insight into good practice. The working group is due to report its findings in late Spring.

Community Cohesion Strategy

Panel Members provided views on the Council's first Community Cohesion Strategy (CCS) during an interactive feedback and voting session similar to an event carried out with a group of local residents. Members sought guidance on action to be taken to address developing further working with the third (voluntary) sector and other activity including encouraging local residents to become community leaders, as well as initiatives to encourage greater use of parks and other amenities including libraries.

Equality and Diversity

A report was received on the outcomes of a peer challenge on equality and diversity which, amongst other things, identified a number of key areas which would enhance Members decision making capacity by furthering their understanding of the communities they represent. The Panel supported this proposal and made a recommendation for equality and diversity training for Members which will include cultural awareness.

Fly-tipping

The Panel acknowledged the continuing efforts by Council Officers in tackling this issue and further action was agreed, including the wide-publication of fly-tipping prosecutions and raising awareness of free recycling facilities within the borough.

Illuminations

The Panel expressed disappointment that the event had operated at a loss for three successive years and voiced concerns over the viability of its continuation. Members noted the national profile the illuminations brought to Walsall as well as their historic significance which provided strong arguments for the events retention. However there was wide agreement amongst the Panel that it was critical that the event was financially sustainable and as a minimum it should not record a loss. In determining the most effective response to these challenges a range of potential solutions were explored by the Panel, these included seeking guidance on the prospects for attracting a national sponsor for the event, as well as the benefits of consulting with residents to determine the reasons they chose not to visit the event which could then be used to help guide future planning and increase visitor numbers. It was further suggested that an entrance fee that was inclusive of unlimited access to fair ground rides might prove more attractive to families.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

A number of Panel Members sought guidance on aspects of the consultation that was undertaken prior to the production of the report and recommendations in relation to the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The panel were given reassurances about the future involvement of Local Neighbourhood Partnerships in any future changes to rights of ways' and the draft Rights of Way

Improvement Plan was referred back to Cabinet for approval.

Sustainable travel to school policy

The Panel welcomed the new policy and recognised the importance of its success in tackling childhood obesity particularly through the reduction in journeys to school made by car. Panel Members requested briefing materials which they would use to promote the Sustainable Travel to School Strategy to other elected Members.

Waste collection policies

In recognising the service's importance to local communities, the Panel requested that they were given the opportunity to review the new waste collection service policies prior to approval by Cabinet. The Panel sought guidance from Officers and the respective portfolio holders on a range of issues including the collection of recycling from flats and maisonettes and action taken to improve recycling rates.

The Panel revisited the scheme after implementation and were pleased to hear its implementation had gone smoothly with minimal problems. Members were concerned to hear about the impact the new scheme had had on the Links to Work service who had previously collected and recycled plastic from certain sites within the borough. Following questions to the portfolio holder for environment members were reassured that work was ongoing with Links to Work to identify alternative sources of

waste for recycling to sustain the service in the long term.

Councillor Call for Action Working Group

The Panel's Councillor Call for Action Working Group has been actively monitoring the introduction of this new initiative and have participated in Government consultations about how this new tool for Members should work. Councillor Call for Action is now set to be introduced later this year and it is anticipated that the working group will play a led role in shaping how it will work at Walsall Council.

Community Action Tasking

The Panel have monitored the implementation of the new Community Action Tasking (CAT) process.

Members were pleased that a body was being established to co-ordinate work and responses between partners at a local level. However, the Panel had concerns about Member and public engagement with the CAT and how Members would receive feedback about actions being undertaken by the CAT. The Panel have raised their concerns and made a number of suggestions for improvements to the process and will revisit the issue at a later date.

Community Association Leases

Following extensive work in previous years, the Panel received an update on the work undertaken with the introduction of community association leases. The Panel were concerned to learn that the issue had stalled since they last

considered it due to financial constraints and negotiations with lease holders. The Panel urged that progress be made with this issue and will monitor in the future.

Other issues considered

The Panel considered a number of issues in a lighter touch format. Decriminalised parking enforcement and the new Highways maintenance contract with Tarmac were monitored through the forward plan on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Membership for 2008/09:

Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)
Councillor S. Coughlan (Vice-Chair)
Councillor D. Anson
Councillor B. Douglas-Maul
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor K. Sears
Councillor W. Tweddle
Councillor A. Underhill

Area Based Grant (ABG) and Working Neighbourhood Fund (WNF)

From early in the Municipal year the Panel viewed as important that the ABG support the objectives of the WNF. During this transitional year the Panel closely monitored the funding allocations proposed.

New Deal for Communities

The Panel highlighted the importance of ensuring that the NDC funded projects in the area were sustainable beyond the life of this funding to 2011. The Panel recognised that the NDC had made significant progress in tackling some key challenges, including achieving some success in addressing worklessness as well as a reduction in crime. The Panel also noted that educational attainment had risen together with encouraging evidence of improvements in resident's health.

Regional Spatial Strategy

In looking at the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Members were particularly keen to consider

potential support for developers in clearing brown field sites for housing, as well as noting the importance of Council committees receiving detailed guidance on the RSS to ensure that local development meets with regional needs and aspirations. The Panel also identified opportunities and challenges in local public transport provision as a vital element of RSS. To support this Members have recommended to Cabinet that a request is made for amendments to the RSS which should include consideration of the potential to improve or develop rail links between key areas within the West Midlands, including Walsall, Wolverhampton, Stourbridge, Birmingham and Lichfield.

St. Matthew's Quarter

Early in the Municipal year the Panel chose to continue with the working group which is considering the future development of the St Matthews Quarter and the market area. The key issue that Members have been considering this year is the options for the future management for the town centre market. Options that have been considered are: Council management, a joint venture between the Council and a private partner or for the market to be wholly managed by a private company. Following consideration of the options the Panel recommended to Cabinet that the Council continue to manage the market in the future.

The Cabinet decision to endorse a joint venture arrangement with a private sector partner and the decision to delegate authority to the portfolio holder for Regeneration

and the Executive Director for Regeneration to agree the details of the development agreement and land disposal was 'called in' and considered by the Panel. Representatives from the market traders association were present and participated in discussions. Members discussed how the town centre market should be managed in the future, and received the draft principles for the market joint venture.

Following consideration of these issues the Panel remained uncertain about the joint venture arrangement and asked Cabinet to delay making a decision on the issue until it had been further considered by the Panel.

Walsall Urban Regeneration Company

Panel expressed strong support for the work being undertaken by the Urban Regeneration Company (URC) in helping encourage economic development as well as supporting the improvement of housing, leisure and retail. To ensure the momentum of this work was maintained the Panel received regular monitoring reports.